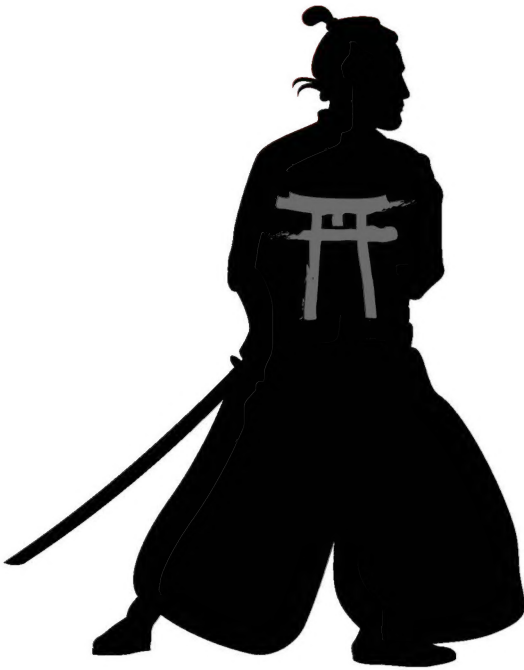


神道

SHINTO

THE WAY OF THE GODS



SAVITRI DEVI

Shinto – The Way of the Gods

by Savitri Devi

Translated by Guido Stucco



"Shinto -- La via degli dei," Arya, no. 4 (July 1980). Trans. Guido Stucco. Savitri Devi's essay "Shinto -- The Way of the Gods" was written in English in New Delhi in 1979. It was then translated into Italian by Vittorio De Cecco for the Italian-language NS periodical Arya, published in Montreal. The English original of the essay is lost; the text above is Guido Stucco's translation of a translation. Portions of Savitri's "Shinto" may have first appeared in Asit Krishna Mukherji's Eastern Economist, which was published in collaboration with the Japanese from 1938-1941.

According to the multi-millennial Japanese tradition, in very ancient times there was once an immense ocean (ironically destined to be called the "Pacific" Ocean), which seemed endless: from one end to the other of the horizon, one could only see water and sky!

Above this immense body of water there was only a light and narrow "bridge." The gods used to go to this bridge to observe and admire the beauty and breadth of this ocean. One of these gods, Izana-Gi, tired of observing the ocean from high above, lowered his spear towards the water and slightly stirred it. After raising the spear he noticed that some mud, attached to the tip of the spear, fell back into the water. This was how the first "island" appeared on earth.

After this, Izana-Gi built a ladder and lowered himself from the "heavenly bridge" onto the ground. He then proceeded to build a small round house for himself and his wife, Izana-Mi, in which they began to meet.

Soon Izana-Mi had some children, who unfortunately turned out to be a disappointment. They were all different from each other and appeared to be weak, unworthy of a divine couple. A general assembly of the gods was gathered to look into the problem and to find the cause of such a failure. The gods asked the couple: "When you get together, who gets to talk first?"

Izana-Mi immediately replied: "Me, obviously"

One of the gods remarked: "This is a serious violation of the rule regulating Rites! A woman should never speak first, since this is one of man's duties and privileges. No wonder your children are not what they ought to be."

The couple followed the advice of the gods to the letter, and soon their children changed for the better, becoming beautiful and strong, worthy heirs of their divine legacy. Izana-Mi did not just give birth to children, but also became the mother of four thousand islands, big and small, which eventually made up Japan. The other countries of the world slowly emerged from the waters through a geological and natural process, which took centuries to unfold. This is why, unlike other countries, Japan is a "divine" land: it originated from a goddess!



Everything went smoothly till the day when Izana-Mi gave birth to the god of fire. Due to the very nature of this god, the goddess died a fiery death when he was born. Her body was taken to the netherworld, the dwelling of the dead. Her husband, Izana-Gi, descended into these lower regions to reclaim his wife's body from the Lords of these regions. As soon as he arrived, he was ordered to wait before the door beyond which laid the body of the goddess.

After waiting for a long time for the door to open, he committed a forbidden act and opened the fatal door himself. Immediately he smelled the smell of death! This experience had a negative effect on Izana-Gi, and right away he decided to rise up to the "world of the living." Nevertheless, he felt impure for having been in contact with the powers of decay and death. Having reached the river Kamo, he decided to take a bath and took off the fourteen layers of his clothes.

While he was washing himself, suddenly some divine beings emerged from the water. At the same time, those fourteen layers became themselves gods. The water that he used to wash his left eye became the Lunar God, while the water he used to wash his right eye became the Solar Goddess, Amaterasu.¹ The water he used to wash his nostrils became the God of Wind and Storms, Susa-no-wo.

Susa-no-wo was an evil god. He loved to torment the Solar Goddess with all kinds of tricks. One day, after causing the carcass of a dead animal to fall on the head of Amaterasu from the top of the ceiling in a room she was working in, Amaterasu decided she had had enough of Susa-no-wo's pranks. She withdrew, feeling very angry, inside a cave and blocked the entrance with a huge stone. Despite the prayers and supplications to be forgiven, Susa-no-wo did not succeed in changing Amaterasu's mind. She remained in the cave, refusing to come out.

Because of this, there was no longer light on earth. Everywhere darkness reigned, and the earth no longer produced good fruits: crops were lost and life itself was in danger for lack of solar light.

The gods were desperate and did not know how to solve this serious problem. At last, one of them, a goddess, had an inspiration. Knowing that Amaterasu was naturally curious, she approached the entrance of the cave and improvised a rather funny and indecent dance, arousing laughter among the gods. Amaterasu wanted to know the reason for this general

¹ The solar character of the religious tradition of Japanese Shinto is embodied in the divine figure of the emperor, believed to be of heavenly origins. He is regarded as a direct descendant of the goddess Amaterasu, whose solar character is found throughout the entire religious tradition of Japan.

hilarity and came close to the entrance of the cave to understand what was going on outside. She peeked through an opening between the cave and the huge stone blocking the entrance, but she could hardly see anything. Then she tried to use her mirror to get a better look. The other goddess, outside, slowly began to walk away from the entrance, forcing Amaterasu to stick her head out. Suddenly the gods jumped on her and pulled her out of the cave by her head, forcing her to leave her hiding place. At that point the light returned on earth.

On his part, Susa-no-wo decided to leave the residence of the gods and just like many other divine heroes who lived on earth, he became a monster-slayer. One day he saw a huge dragon about to devour a young maid. He came to her rescue right away and killed the dragon. He eventually married her and became the forefather of several large Japanese noble families. Knowing that the dragon had a sword inside his stomach, Susa-no-wo cut it open and claimed it for himself.²

Amaterasu wanted to give Japan (the land of the rising sun) a leader who could take control of the islands. She begat a child and told him to go to the land of the rising sun to take charge of the destiny of the people who lived there, but her son did not want to accept such responsibility. He openly told his mother that he did not intend to go to such a land, since its inhabitants spent most of their time quarrelling among themselves. He said: "Send another in my place, my son Ninizi." And so it was. Ninizi had three children, one of whom, A-Ho-Demi, had married the Sea God's daughter. She had brought him as a present the magical jewel of the high and low tides through which he could rule over and control the water.

His son, Jimmu-Tenno, was the first "historical" Emperor of Japan. His dynasty has ruled without interruption from then on. Jimmu-Tenno enjoyed a long reign; however his rule is measured in "years" rather than in "centuries," as in the case of his predecessors. According to Japanese tradition he came to power on February 11th, 660 BC.

² The sword, together with a mirror and a jewel are sacred symbols still employed in Shinto rituals.

At the same time a Greek traveller named Eudoros landed on the southern coast of Gaul, married the daughter of a local Gallic chieftain and founded the city known today as Marseilles. Today, February 11th is still a national Japanese holiday.



We have already mentioned the Jewel, the Sword and the Mirror. With these objects endowed with a magical and divine power, the Empress Jingo conquered Korea in 200 AD. According to Japanese tradition, the gods had told her husband (who in the meantime had died), that the lands west of Japan "awaited to be conquered." Today, the three most sacred symbols (the Mirror of the goddess Amaterasu; the Sword that Susa-no-wo found in the belly of the Dragon which he slew; the magical Jewel of the high and low tides given to Ho-Demi by his wife's father, the Sea God) are kept in the Temple of Ise, which is the sanctuary most venerated by the Japanese.

In 1941, the imperial government sent an official delegation to this temple, in order to ask the national gods: "Should we declare war on the US?" The gods, through the priests officiating the national cult, answered in the positive. On December 7th, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the naval base of Pearl Harbor, located in Hawaii. In 1945, after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as a result of nuclear bombs, the gods were again consulted by the Japanese government in the Ise Temple. The question was phrased in these terms: "Should we die fighting to the last man or should we capitulate and prepare to fight again in the future?" The gods' reply was: "Surrender, because we love your people." The rest is history.

The American occupation, which lasted several years, never completely broke the spirit of Japan, namely, the spirit of Shinto. Shinto is the national Japanese religion. Its essence may be summarily contained in these terms: the cult of the Sun, which is the main god of Japan, and the cult of national heroes and of the ancestors. In Japan all religions are tolerated. Many even classify it as a Buddhist nation. This is true in a certain sense. Buddhism was introduced in Japan in 550 AD, from neighboring Korea, thanks to

prince Shotoku, who died in 601 AD. However, in order to thrive, Buddhism had to incorporate several Shinto beliefs and practices. Several Japanese rulers, such as those of the well-known dynasty of Shoguns which lasted until 1866, embraced Zen Buddhism. However, the heroic-warrior spirit of Shinto, which worships nature, the Sun and the Japanese race's ancestors, was always present in them.

There are several unforgettable texts and poems that express this Shinto spirit embodied in the life of Japanese people. These texts talk about the supreme detachment exhibited in every action of the lives of the members of the national Japanese cult. Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the great warrior and administrator who built the famous fortress of Osaka, apparently wrote shortly before dying: "Like a drop of water I will disappear and turn into air, but the Osaka fortress will stand like a wonderful dream." To this day this fortress is still standing, strong and proud, as a national monument.

On August 14th, 1281, Kublai Khan, Genghis Khan's nephew, sent his war fleet, comprising several hundred vessels, to conquer Japan. The Japanese could not have deflected this threat for a long time. Nevertheless they were ready and determined to fight and die to the last man in order to defend their land against the Mongol invader. Suddenly a strong wind, forerunner of a horrible storm, totally destroyed the powerful enemy fleet. Six centuries later the Emperor Meiji wrote in a poem: "Do as much as you are able through your natural powers; but then kneel down, and thank and worship the divine wind of Ise, which destroyed the Tartars' fleet."

There are several popular sayings that illustrate the Shinto spirit, such as this: "Be like the sakura (the cherry's blossom) when its time to fall and die comes. When the storm will shake the tree, you will surely fall and die. But you will fall and die gracefully."

The Japanese people knew how to "fall gracefully" in the course of their history. Nevertheless, they always knew how to save face and to live by their values. We cannot remember without admiration the famous kamikaze pilots, young men who volunteered to die aboard their planes which became "flying bombs." These young people immolated themselves on American war ships and especially on aircraft-carriers. We ought to remember their

attacks on the aircraft carriers "Repulse" and "Prince of Wales." I was told that these pilots were anxious to reach the "great day" of their sacrifice; as their final day drew closer they became increasingly happy to donate their lives for their Country and their Emperor. In their last thoughts they remembered their brief lives and their loyalty to the Rising Sun, which was embodied in the solar dynasty of the Emperors. Before crashing they cried for the last time their war cry which aptly expressed their state of mind: "*Heike Tenno Banzai!*"³ Then, calmly and firmly, they guided their airplanes loaded with high explosives onto the enemy targets that had been chosen to be hit and destroyed.

Shinto scriptures, particularly the *Kojiki* (*The Book of the Gods*) and the text known as the *Nihongi* (*The Book of the Emperors*), written around 720 A.D., eight years after the compilation of the *Kojiki*, dedicated to various leaders and Emperors (who, according to national tradition, were children of the sun), were written during the reign of the Emperor Jimmu, in the eighth century. Shinto took its shape as a religion of nature and of heroes thanks to two great Japanese scholars, Maturi and Hirata. When Japan surrendered in 1945, the landing of American troops on Japanese soil represented a unique event in Japan's national history, since they were the first ever to occupy the land of the Rising Sun. The American army was the only one in Japan's history to have set foot on its territory. Moreover, this Army came to impose on the Japanese people an ideology radically foreign to their mind-set, spirituality, and national identity.

One of the first policies of the American occupational government was to prohibit the teaching, in all the schools of Japan, of the above mentioned Shinto texts, namely of *The Book of the Gods* and *The Book of the Emperors*. The Japanese posed no resistance to these hostile actions. (But then again, why should they have resisted? The gods had clearly said that it was necessary to accept the terms of surrender and to go on "living"). Japan bowed its head with a smile: "Democracy? Sure! The Emperor is a man like everyone else? Very well! You call our political and military leaders 'War

³ The meaning of this expression is: "May the Emperor live ten thousand years!"

criminals.' We assume that you are right, since you have won the war, and as history teaches, the winners are *always right*." The Japanese smiled until a peace treaty, relatively and comparatively not too harsh, was signed. They smiled until the day when the last soldier of the American occupation forces left the land of the Rising Sun. The following day, the sacred texts of Shintoism were re-introduced in the classrooms. Moreover, school children were taken to visit (a practice still followed nowadays) the remains of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which had been destroyed by nuclear bombs, to admire the genial work of the "defenders of mankind." As if that was not enough, students were taken to visit the Temple of Gamagori, which holds the remains of general Hideki Tojo and other "war criminals" killed by the Americans. Every Japanese student has the honor of lighting a small incense stick to venerate the memory of these men who sacrificed themselves for Japan and for its people. These "war criminals" are still regarded today as national heroes and their persons are and will be venerated as such in the centuries to come.⁴

Oh, poor Japan, faithful to your sons, our ally during WW II! I admire and envy you! When will we Europeans build a Temple or at least a monument to honor the memory of our heroes, of our dead, of our leaders, which our enemies still call today "war criminals"? When will we publicly and freely pay homage to our dead as you do to yours?

We too would have been able to faithfully honor our fallen comrades if our Princes and Kings, a long time ago, beginning with the fifth all the way to the fifteenth century in Prussia, would not have imposed Christianity, through sheer force, on our Aryan populations. Do not forget, dear Japanese friends, that Aryans, before being converted, were "*worshippers of the Sun*," faithful followers of the cult of heroes, blood and soil, just like you! One of your fellow countrymen, who worked at the

⁴ For a complete description of how these so-called Japanese "war criminals" died, see the French translation of *La voie de l'Eternité* (1973), by Pierre Pascal, of Shinsho Hanayama's book *The Way of Eternity*. This author spent time with these heroes of the Rising Sun during the last months of their lives.

Japanese Embassy in Calcutta in 1940, was right when he told me, "Your National Socialism is, according to us, just a Western form of Shinto!"

